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ABSTRACT

This paper provides ideas implemented by one school librarian to improve and encourage the use of the school library by Limited-English-Proficiency (LEP) and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students at the school. First, a description is given of how the librarian fostered a positive and welcoming environment for introducing the students to the school library. Also discussed are the efforts made by the librarian to provide hands-on activities, explanations, demonstrations of the various areas of the library and their uses and reading materials in the students' first languages which introduce them to the library collection, what kind of resources can be provided to ESL as well as mainstream teachers by the librarian, how collaborating with other agencies outside of the school who serve ESL students can benefit the students, the coordination of multicultural activities, and activities for promoting literacy skills. It is suggested that through library services provided for ESL/LEP students, these students can become equal participants in society through access to information and knowledge and thus have the opportunity to engage in the whole range of literacy. (VWL)

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The Role of the School Library in Serving LEP/ESL Students

Current issues in literacy, LEP/ESL education, and the role of the school library in addressing these issues led me to the aspect of defining the role of the school library in serving LEP?ESL students. Because my research indicated that the role of the school library in the bilingual educational process is still undertermined, I focused my own efforts on the role of the high school library in engaging LEP/ESL students in the whole range of literacy through library services and to provide a setting, as well, in supporting multicultural diversity.

Acknowledging my moral responsibility as a librarian - that not one person lacks equal access to knowledge - I initiated the following programs in an attempt to broaden the role of the school library in effecting literacy experiences for the LEP/ESL students.

A WELCOMING PLACE: To foster a positive environment in the school library for the LEP students, I developed strategies to avoid fear of the unfamiliar. With the ESL teacher present, the LEP/ESL students were introduced to the library at a time when there were no other classes assigned to use the library. Each student was given a diagram of the library, was walked through each area beginning at the entrance, and assisted in labeling each area on the diagram. Hands on activities were provided in the various areas, including practice in the use of the copy machine. Thereafter, students returned to the library on an individual basis, or in pairs, with a specific request to see me personally; at this time, I gave individual explanations and demonstrations of the various areas and their uses. Eventually, students were sent to me with individual assignments. By this time, they were familiar with the library staff, who knew them by name; thus, they did not hesitate to approach me or the staff for help. Students were encouraged to use the library before school, after school, and during study hall periods. With personal acknowledgement of

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who they are, LEP/ESL students have found the library to be a safe and welcoming place, and have become frequent users of the school library, both alone and with others. By creating a positive climate, we provided the LEP/ESL students with a place for learning, sharing and personal growth.

THE COLLECTION: To draw the LEP students into a pattern of regular library use, there was a need to provide reading materials in their first languages. To meet the full range of interests and reading abilities, collections of fiction and non-fiction books in Spanish, Arabic, and Portuguese were borrowed for extended loan through Interlibrary Loan. Titles and subjects reflected requests from students and parents ranging from teenage romances to novels by Danielle Steele and Stephen King. LEP/ESL students from the Junior High School also borrowed from this collection. That the students have recognized the library as a place to access personal needs is evidenced by the request by a student's married sister to purchase a Portuguese/American Dictionary for her personal needs.

With school library funds, a small collection of Portuguese books, a weekly Portuguese newspaper, a Spanish newspaper, and foreign language dictionaries were purchased. Spanish magazines were contributed by the Spanish language teacher.

High Interest, low reading level paperbacks in English were borrowed from a local public library's 'literacy' collection. At the request of the ESL teacher, these books are housed in the ESL classroom for easy access during classroom times.

A listening station with a cassette player and headphone was made available in the library conference room for LEP/ESL students to use with a collection of read-a-long books in English. Most of these titles are standard classics which are required reading for high school students.

A collection of wordless books was borrowed from several public libraries for use in the ESL classroom, however the ESL teacher did not find them useful. Many LEP/ESL teachers on the elementary level report that they find great uses with these books.

Eventually, this collection of materials in both the first and second language of the LEP/ESL students should develop the interest, desire and ability of the LEP/ESL students to become lifelong learners through continued library participation.

RESOURCES FOR THE ESL TEACHER: An essential instructional strategy for ESL classrooms is the use of Advanced Organizers, resources which are a significant aspect of the library collection and services, and which provide prerequisite information for new material to be meaningful and for learning to take place. They assist in the development of a schema, enabling new ideas to be consciously reconciled with, and integrated with, previously learned content. The Advanced Organizers requested by the ESL teacher were visuals and reading materials appropriate for key themes and subject areas in the ESL text. The visuals provided were in the form of pictures, study prints, posters, charts, graphs, maps, atlas , time lines, and filmstrips. Books on the themes and subjects were provided, readings that were difficult for LEP/ESL students were pre-recorded on audio cassettes, and listening stations were provided for these cassettes. A bibliography of these Advanced Organizers was prepared for the LEP/ESL teacher, since materials were collected from several libraries.

RESOURCES FOR THE MAINSTREAM TEACHERS: Mainstream teachers were informed by the ESL teacher that I would provide Advanced Organizers appropriate to their content subject. Previous to the presentation of a new subject or topic, the mainstream teacher may either request Advanced Organizers appropriate to provide schema, or the teacher may make an appointment for the LEP student to work with me in the library in locating and using these materials. Through this collaboration with teachers, students, and librarian, the goal to link the Advanced Organizers with the learning of library skills will enable the LEP students to become independent researchers of information.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES: When I was providing Advanced Organizers on the theme of 'occupations' for the ESL teacher, I used this opportunity to bridge the school library resources with the resources of other agencies and

institutions. A program with speakers on occupations, career choices, vocational and education options was arranged for the LEP students through the Community College of Rhode Island. Representing the college were an admission officer, a Spanish-speaking counselor from Access to Opportunity (a counseling and mentor program for ESL, at risk, low income, and disadvantaged students), and a Spanish-speaking counselor from The Education Opportunity Center (a pre-admission center for ESL students needing counseling in language competency, financial aid, admission requirements, GED information, etc.). This program was held in the school library in Spanish and English with an interpreter for the Portuguese students. Follow-up appointments were made and the counselor from The Educational Opportunity Center has been returning weekly to the school library for individual counseling.

By collaborating with outside agencies who serve ESL students, the school library promotes the concept of an even wider array of information beyond the school library.

MULTICULTURAL ACTIVITIES: The school library has a unique role in the integration of cultural differences within the school community. Since library services are essential to all segments of the school population and school activities, the librarian holds a strategic position as an integrator, cordinator, negotiator, unifier, and equalizer.

When a class of Anglo students was researching Christmas customs around the world, and the class of ESL students was researching Christmas traditions in the United States, I proposed and offered to co-ordinate an intercultural program between the two classes to exchange Christmas customs and traditions. When the class of LEP/ESL students was researching the history, foods, menu and foods of Thanksgiving, I proposed and offered to co-ordinate a program with the home economics class and the ESL class in preparing a Thanksgiving dinner.

Possibilities for initiating activities throughout the school year that promote multi-cultural understanding and exchange cultural traditions are unlimited through the school library.

LITERACY ACTIVITY: The most essential element in the complex design of school library services to the LEP/ESL students appears to be the promotion of literacy. The literacy activity which I developed took shape out of a situation which existed and my ability to create a context and literacy meaning to this situation. This happened when I observed Anglo seniors assigned to the high school library for Spanish IV Independent Study. With the intent to provide opportunities for Anglo students to improve their Spanish literacy and for Spanish students to improve their English literacy by meeting together to speak, listen, read and write Spanish and English, I identified LEP Spanish-speaking students who were in a Spanish class during that same period. By forming alliances with the Spanish teachers of these students, I received their co-operation. Through the sanction and support of these teachers, two groups were formed. Students were assigned to me in the library for one period each week, were informed by their teachers that the purpose of the groups was to provide the opportunity to develop their English and Spanish literacy, and were informed that they will be graded by me for effort and participation. Spanish/English Dictionaries were available at each meeting.

The initial sessions were essentially oral communication in Spanish and English. Since these students were strangers to each other, much of these early sessions required my directing the flow and topic of conversation. When differences of teenage culture in Mexico were explored, Spanish students were the information givers and the Anglo students were the information seekers. The Spanish students enjoyed this status and the Anglo students respected the literacy of the Spanish students. Through these dialogues, the Anglo students displayed assumptions and generalizations about all LEP/ESL students, but the Spanish students were not ready to correct, or clarify these generalizations. For instance, Anglo students assumed that LEP/ESL students left their homelands for liberty and freedom, whereas the Spanish students, unlike the Cambodians, left Mexico for economic reasons.

I then moved the group into reading Spanish by allowing the student s to select the reading material from the collection of Spanish books, magazines and newspapers. After going through magazines for articles to read and discuss, the Anglo students decided that there was nothing of interest in the Spanish magazines. Again, the Spanish students did not offer to explain the cultural implications in the articles, and to explore with the Anglo students, issues that were important to Spanish people that might not be of interest to Anglo people.

The next reading selection, chosen by the Spanish students, was 'Citas Citables'. (notable sayings) from a Spanish Readers' Digest. This activity called for the students to read the saying orally in Spanish, to translate it into English, and then to give an interpretation in either language. The interpretations of the Anglo students differed notably from those of the Spanish students. Invariably, the interpretations of the Anglo students represented abstract ideas, whereas those of the Spanish students represented family, home, parents and friends. For example, in a saying which describes justice as a light which we don't know what it consist of but when it is missing, we note its absence, the Anglo students related this to the role of the judicial system, the law, our court system and justice done. The Spanish students related this to people's problems, people in need, people helping each other, and the loss of a friend or a father who cares. This seems to be a graphic example of the decontextualized way of looking at justice by the Anglo students and the Hispanic tradition of contextualizing the notion of how justice is viewed. The Anglo students did not find most of these sayings meaningful; the Spanish students enjoyed these, found them meaningful and described how they often heard notable sayings both in school and at home. However, the Spanish students did not attempt to explain their differences in interpretations, nor did the Anglo students attempt to elicit reasons from them to explain, or explore these differences.

This lead me to a discussion on the meaning of culture, what they thought culture was, how one knows when differences are because of culture or purely personal, and if

justice was culture. After this discussion on culture, value, and beliefs, we negotiated the possibility of an activity that would generate a literacy end product of either a school guide in Spanish and English, a newsletter in Spanish, a Spanish radio program, or even a Spanish news spot on cable TV. Students agreed to keep a journal of their observations of what is going on around them in class, outside of class, at school functions, and interactions between the LEP students and Anglo students, to write about these differences, and to ask themselves if these differences are cultural.

From these observations, we began the writing segment of this literacy activity. The Spanish students wrote to the Anglo students about their observations in Spanish, the Anglo students wrote to the Spanish students in English, and each replied to the letters in their first language. Using the social and educational issues generated through these observations to engage the students in literacy activities will also create strategies to effect positive change within the school community.

UNINTENDED OUTCOMES: Although intended as a literacy activity, these group meeting also produced a greater appreciation and understanding of multi-cultural diversity, empowered students, and allowed for friendships to form.

Anglo students tell me that they now say 'hi' and speak to Spanish students when passing in the corridor. When the group meetings are over, I observe the Spanish students waiting for the Anglo students in order to walk out of the library together, engaged in conversation. On one occasion when the group had to wait for me, an Anglo student and a Spanish student used the time in speaking to each other in Spanish about graduation, college, school, personal goals, and feeling about school. On another occasion, before the group session, an Anglo student was explaining, in Spanish, to a Spanish student why a demolished automobile was brought to the school lawn, and explained the school assembly on drunk driving. I observe these as indicators that both Anglo and Spanish students are exploring their own perceptions and beliefs about each other.

There are indications of a growing sense of equalization in status between the Anglo and Spanish students. In one sense, I observe the Anglo students acknowledging the language expertise of the Spanish students, and rely on asking help from the Spanish students more often than using the dictionary. They ask the Spanish students for validation of syntax, vocabulary, and grammar, and now elicit explanations from the Spanish students.

That the Spanish students are becoming empowered is observable by comparing their interactions at the beginning of these meetings with the interactions and responses at present meetings. At the beginning, the Spanish students accepted the assumptions about them without any disagreement or defense of their position. For instance, when the Anglo students dismissed the Spanish cartoons as 'stupid' because they saw no humor, the Spanish students did not attempt to explain the cultural context of the humor. However, recently, an Anglo student wrote to a Spanish student through the dialogue journals of her observation that, when the Spanish students sit together in the cafeteria and speak together in Spanish, the Anglo students get angry and make comments. The Spanish student wrote back to her that "communication is very important", and continued to say that the Spanish students notice and know by the manner in which the Anglo students look at them that they are making comments about the Spanish students, and that he is not interested in their comments because he is in school to learn and not to see who is talking about him. However, he does add that he would like to know what they (the Anglo students) think about him.

Clearly, in order for this dialogue to have occurred, a sense of trust had developed. Moreover, a sense of courage and empowerment was required to enable the Spanish student to respond in such a forthright manner.

Another journal entry by a Spanish student was an insightful observation of the differences of rules of behavior in school with respect to teachers, to women, between students, and the acceptance of a behavior which is not tolerated in their home country.

Such issues can be explored in future meetings by asking questions to guide further observations and to elicit cultural comparisons.

These observations, journal writings, and cultural comparisons can lead to identifying problem areas for LEP/ESL students trying to integrate into the school and for Anglo students who do not know or understand the LEP/ESL students. From this a literacy activity can be generated such as a guide book to help facilitate integration of the LEP/ESL students into the school community.

It is expected that through these library services to the LEP/ESL students, they will become equal participants in society through access to information and knowledge. It is through this access that one has the opportunity to engage in the whole range of literacy.